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ABSTRACT

The administrator of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) describes the mission of the center and discusses the types of information collected with relevance for special education. Noted are analyses of public and private sectors in elementary/secondary education on such topics as enrollment, graduates, faculty, expenditures and revenues by source, and teacher supply and demand. Among NCES publications that are described are the Digest of Educaton Statistics, a statistical abstract; the Condition of Education, a Congressionally mandated report; and Projections of Education Statistics. Additonal reports on private schools and special education (such as the longitudinal study on high school and beyond) are considered, and major findings highlighted. (CL)

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"-The NCES Commitment to Excellence-"

by

Marie D. Eldridge

Administrator

National Center for Education Statistics

When I received your invitation to speak to your Annual Convention last August, I was very pleased. The National Center has long been concerned with the collection of education information about both the private school sector and those schools serving special needs, and I will describe some of our activities in these areas in a few moments. I might also say that the idea of coming from Washington to Florida in January was not altogether unattractive! To quote a TV commercial shown up North designed to bring us to this lovely State (climate) "I need it bad".

Perhaps the best way to lead into a discussion of areas of our common interest is to summarize briefly the overall mission and role of the National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES. We are one of six general purpose statistical agencies in the Federal government; the others being the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Agricultural Statistical Reporting

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Luncheon Address before the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children, Palm Beach, Florida, January 27, 1984.

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Services, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Energy Information Administration. Of course, many other agencies maintain some statistical activities, but the "general purpose" agencies provide statistical data of use to the entire community, whether it is in government, external research and policy determination, Congressional activity, or media dissemination. To accomplish this function we collect a core of data, most of which is secured from administrative records at the Institutional or State and local government level. In addition, we undertake special studies, which can be either periodic or one-time efforts, to augment our core and to respond to "current" policy issues.

Although NCES is the smallest of the general purpose statistical agencies, we take great pride in the fact that within the Center is housed the single enduring function carried on without interruption from the establishment of the original Department of Education in 1867. The Act that established the Department stated in part that the Department was:

> ". . . for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems and methods of teaching . . ."

The NCES goal, based on our mandates in the Education Amendments of 1974 are not very different. We aim to provide statistics and analyses that are of high quality, timely and not subject to political influence. That is our "commitment to Excellence".

We have four basic functions which are derived from our enabling legislation:

(1) we collect and report statistics on the conditions of education in the United States,

(2) we conduct and publish reports on specialized analyses;

(3) we assist State and local educational agencies in improving and automating their statistical activities; and

(4) to a limited extent, we review and report international data.

I would assume that you are most interested in something about the nature of the data we collect to report on the condition of education, with particular emphasis on those data sets and analyses which bear on special education. But before I do that, I would like to read a quotation:

> "Why do we seek to know the condition of education? In the answer to this question will be found the reasons for the elaborate statistical record which forms a feature of all official school reports. We take an account of education that we may know whether it is sufficient in amount and good in quality."

That was written by Henry Barnard, first Commissioner of Education, over 100 years ago, in 1880.

This very wise and forward-looking man also had something to say about you. In 1878 he said:

> ". . . the relation between the Office (of Education) and the educators of the country, upon which the success and usefulness of the Office have largely depended, is a cordial one. Educators manifest this both by furnishing the Office information, frequently at great labor and expense to themselves, and by their appreciation of the summaries and generalizations it is able to make and the frequency of their calls for the same."

We at NCES continue to be keenly aware of how much the success of our efforts depends upon cordial relations with the educators of the country. We are acutely aware that the "great labor and expense" of which Barnard spoke continues, and that data acquisition for us means data burden for you. We could not provide the majority of our data without high level and willing cooperation from the field.

We are constartly seeking out opportunities to reduce that burden by consolidating forms, merging systems with other agencies, utilizing existing data, and moving on to sampling whenever possible. And we hope that our respondents continue, as they did 106 years ago, to appreciate the summaries and generalizations we are able to make.

But this introduction doesn't yet give you a flavor of the specific things we do. To provide more insight let me summarize the information we collect and disseminate.

Our basic core program is organized around elementary/secondary and postsecondary education. And within each of those areas we deal with the public and private sectors. We aim to provide appropriate statistical information and analyses which measure the vitality of public and private education in the United States. In addition to the basic core data which deals routinely with enrollment, graduates, faculty, other staff, expenditures and revenues by source, NCES conducts special surveys periodically to supplement these data. We use the Census Current Population Survey to secure estimates that are not institutionally based; we also conduct special studies of teacher supply and demand.

In addition to our core, we have established a capability, and I guess I should say an expectation, for longitudinal surveys. I'm sure most of you are familiar with many of the findings of our 1972 National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) and our 1980-82 cohorts for High School and Beyond. I will discuss some of our specific findings from recent longitudinal studies as they relate to the handicapped later.

It is not possible, or reasonable, for me to try to familiarize you with all the specifics of our surveys. Instead, I'd like to spend a few minutes telling you how we disseminate them and how you can access them if you need data in more detail than we publish.

There are two publications which annually vie for first place on the best seller list at the Government Printing Office in the Education Series. The Digest of Education Statistics is probably the best known; it is our statistical abstract. It contains lots of data for those who are accustomed to searching abstracts. There is very little text. The second publication is our annual Condition of Education report, which is a Congressionally mandated report initiated in 1974 and published each year since. It is related to the Digest, in that, it, too, presents data but not in an abstract form. The Condition of Education is a popularized compendium which addresses varying issues from year to year, dictated by available data and issues of particular importance. The Condition has a graph for just about every table for those who like pictures better than figures and considerable interpretative narrative is also included. The 1981 edition of the Condition devoted a total

chapter on the Education of the Handicapped drawing on data from the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Special Education. I am confident that you are familiar with these data.

In addition, we have published biennially another general purpose publication, Projections of Education Statistics. This report provides an internally consistent set of projections for most key education statistics. Projections contains tables, charts and narratives on enrollment, teachers, graduates, and expenditure data at both the elementary/secondary and postsecondary levels for the past 11 years and projects them for the next 10 years. In order to satisfy the optimistic, the pessimistic and the indifferent, we provide high, low and intermediate projections for most data series.

While the three publications constitute the most widely used of NCES's core dissemination program, the Center publishes 50-60 documents per year that detail particular aspects of education for planners and researchers. These are comprised of a variety of forms: early releases that present preliminary data, reports and bulletins, analyses, directories, and handbooks of standard terminology. They focus on information about students, teachers and schools in the aggregate, based on collections of data mostly from institutions. Much of this information, the brief Bulletins, Announcements and Early Releases are available to you directly from us. The comprehensive publications such as the Condition of Education and the Digest are available from the Government Printing Office, and some data series are available directly from NCES on computer tapes. In addition, NCES maintains a Statistical Information Office which compiles data from many sources and responds to 20-25,000 requests each year for information based upon the Center's various data bases.

Now I'd like to return to a few of the data sets which may be of particular interest to you and their findings.

First, the Private School Survey. As of the fall of 1980, the last year for which we have complete data, over 5 million students attended 21,000 private elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. Private schools constituted nearly 20% of the total number of elementary and secondary schools. To continue with a few of the results of this survey:

* The 5 million students enrolled in private schools comprised nearly 11 percent of total elementary/secondary enrollment.
* Private schools employed 281 thousand teachers, representing more than 11 percent of total elementary/secondary teachers.
* Catholic schools accounted for 46 percent of the total number of private schools in the United States and enrolled over 63 percent of the private school students.
* The average enrollment size of a private school is 239 students, although non-Catholic religiously affiliated schools had an average school size of only 158 compared with 330 for the Catholic schools. In contrast, the average enrollment size for public schools was 476.
* Overall, the pupil-teacher ratio for private schools was 18 to 1, with schools not religiously affiliated having 12 pupils for each teacher. Public schools have a pupil-teacher ratio similar to that of all private schools, 19 to 1 for 1980.

We also found that Private Schools are most rare in the West and Southwest, ranging from 4% of the schools in Utah and Oklahoma to 11% of the schools in Kansas and Texas. On the other hand, they occur most frequently in the East and the big states of Florida and California, ranging from 33% in the District

of Columbia and Hawaii (an exception) to 26% in New Jersey and California. Generally, the States are arrayed in a similar fashion with respect to percentage enrollment found in the private schools, ranging from 2% in Utah to 19% in Delaware.

I wish that I could report more recent data to you, but our current study of private schools (1983-84) is in the field right now, and the data will not be available until later this year. This new study is being based upon a sample of over 1,600 schools from a universe of private schools which has now grown slightly to 22,000. The use of a sampling approach will make it possible to collect considerable additional information without violating the principles of Federal paperwork burden reduction. Among the items of additional school information are race/ethnic data and some basic information about the school's program, including the number of handicapped students served, along with funding source and estimated revenues by source.

Now let us turn to the topic of Special Education.

In government, current discussions and debate on the education of the handicapped center on two major research issues. The first concerns the extent to which, and ways in which, recently enacted legal mandates are in fact being carried out by various state and local education authorities. The second issue concerns the educational experiences of handicapped students. Many of the questions concerning the quality of education for handicapped students are couched in terms of the transition from school to work or school to postsecondary education. It is clear that such issues can be directly

addressed with longitudinal data of the kind available in our High School and Beyond (HS&B study).

HS&B is comprised of nationally representative cohorts of 28,000 1980 seniors and 30,000 1980 sophomores. initially studied in 1980, followed up in 1982, and scheduled for additional followup at two-year intervals. Although the study was limited to students in diploma granting programs and students whom the teachers felt would not be "at risk" due to emotional or physical limitations were they asked to fill out the questionnaires, (this of course, excluding a proportion of the traditional special education students) the findings regarding the Self-identified and Teacher-identified Handicapped Students should be of some interest to you. A wide variety of information is collected about these students, including school based as well as student-based measures. In addition to information about special programs for the handicapped, students were asked whether they had any of seven specific handicaps, whether they had a condition that limited the kinds or amounts of work or education they could get, and whether they had participated in special programs for the physically or educationally handicapped.

Earlier this month, Dr. Carol Stocking, of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), presented a seminar at NCES in which she analyzed the consistency of "handicapped" data in the HS&B study data regarding this point. She used data weighted to represent national estimates, and one or more positive responses to any of the handicap questions in the questionnaire as the indicator of being handicapped. Based on the 1980 data alone, the percentage of handicapped was 11.6 for seniors and 15.7 for sophomores; based

upon the followup data collected in 1982, the figures were 12.4% for the senior cohort, and 18.1% for the sophomore cohort. To some extent the difference between seniors and sophomores would be expected if, as was the case, the dropout rate were higher for the handicapped. Not only are these figures substantially higher than the levels we traditionally see, but only 3.5% of the seniors and 6.0% of the sophomores reported themselves as handicapped at both points in time. Thus, we have possibly more acute handicapped impaired than sustained conditions, or at least conditions sustained for two years or more.

If we assume that the apparent lack of stability in the percentage handicapped for the HS&B data is largely the result of classification error, the data are limited in value. However, Dr. Stocking suggested an alternative analysis, i.e, that some students view themselves as handicapped depending upon current, situational factors.

Of course some students have conditions that they will always report (e.g., deafness), but others may view minor anomalies as handicapping at one time and not at another. In other words, "handicapped" may sometimes be a "state" (transitory and dependent upon other factors) as opposed to a "trait" (permanent and part of the continuing self-image). If this were true, we would indeed expect self-reports to change over time.

Further examination of the HS&B data lends some support to this hypothesis. If we look at variables which we might assume would be closely related to handicapped status, e.g., dropout rate, falling behind in school, etc., we

find that those who consistently reported themselves as handicapped seemed to have more problems than those whose self-report identified them as handicapped at only one point in time. For example, almost 20% of those who consistently reported handicaps had repeated a grade prior to 1980, as compared to 13% of the inconsistent reporters and 7% of the non-handicapped group. Also, in the sophomore cohort, 19% of consistent reporters vs. 13-18% of inconsistent reporters and 12.6% of non-handicapped students dropped out before graduation. Other supportive analyses showed that students who reported that they were handicapped at both times had less sense of control of their own lives, lower self esteem and fewer positive experiences than the inconsistent group and the non-handicapped group, and that these effects remained when the effects of race, sex, and socioeconomic status were removed. And perhaps one of the most interesting findings of Dr. Stocking's study, which will be released later this year, is that when she looked at the academic achievement of the students who did not indicate, during either of the years, they had a handicap and related those grades to the teacher's assessment of the presence of any handicapping condition, she found lower grades for those identified as handicapped by the teacher. This clearly raises the question, are the grades lower because the teacher perceives the child as handicapped or does the teacher perceive the child as handicapped because achievement is perhaps falling short of expectation?

This then brings me to one other study I would like to share with you, before I close.

From time to time in recent years we have done a study of recent college graduates, in order to find out what further educational and work experiences

they encounter. In these surveys we are especially interested in those graduates who are qualified to teach. Recently we have analyzed the last two surveys, the 1978 survey of 1977 graduates and the 1981 survey of 1980 graduates, regarding graduates newly qualified to teach in the field of special education programs.

For both survey years, these data show that some 16-17% of bachelor's and master's recipients newly qualified to teach are qualified in special education programs. This amounted to about 23,000 of the 1979-80 graduates. Of this number, about 17,000 were actually teaching in 1981, 14,000 of whom were teaching in special education. Many of the teachers had multiple teaching assignments, but the types of handicaps most frequently encountered were specific learning disabilities (12,000), mentally retarded (11,000), and speech impaired and emotionally disturbed (8,000 each). These data should give you some idea of the annual pool of new teachers upon which you can draw.

Let me conclude by trying to put our efforts at NCES in perspective. Although she was speaking about the problems of programmatic gaps and uncoordinated delivery systems at the time, Madeleine Will, the Department's newly appointed Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, raised what I believe is still the critical point in the assembly of valid and useful information about the education of the handicapped. In an interview reported in the November 9, 1983 issue of Education Week, Mrs. Will said, "There's still a stigma attached to being identified with a label; learning-disabled, which is one label most frequently used, is not as onerous as some of the others. But it is not an asset to be identified as a learning disabled child . . ."

Most of the gaps in our statistical information base regarding the education of the handicapped derive in some way from the fundamental problems of defining, diagnosing and identifying those handicaps about which we must collect the information necessary for planning and policy making. In view of our necessary regard for individual rights and sensibilities in this area, progress in filling the data gaps is likely to be slow. In the meantime, we must depend on the results of general surveys, such as HS&B, to provide us with the estimates, fallible though they may be, which we need to guide our progress in the education of the handicapped. NCES will continue its efforts to work with you in providing this critical information. Should any of you have any suggestions for me as to how to improve our data on the handicapped students in this country, I would be more than delighted to hear from you.

It has been a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with you . . .